

Diwan Chand Ahir (28 Feb, 1928 – 12 July, 2012), a great researcher on Buddhism and Dr. Ambedkar who published 72 books, would be always remembered among the academicians and researchers all over the world. His association with Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar left a great impact on him and his works. He has many awards to his credit. The Government of Sri Lanka conferred on him the honour of '**Buddha Sasanajyoti**' on 19th January, 2003. On 26th January, 2010, he was awarded '**Samyak Prakashan Sahitya Samman 2010**' for his remarkable contribution to literature by Samyak Prakashan, Delhi. On 30th November, 2001, the Mahabodhi Society of India (Sarnath) conferred on him the honorary title of '**Bauddha Sahitya Shiromani**'. As he has passed away on 12th July, 2012, it would be a rich tribute to him to remember his life, events, writings and other valuable contributions. To commemorate him, this article is divided into the following six parts:

- Interview with him, conducted by myself and Prof. Timothy Fitzgerald,
- His life sketch,
- His association with Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar,
- Towards Buddhism,
- His writings
- His participation in Seminars & conferences.



This Photo of D.C.Ahir was taken by me at his residence in New Delhi on 19th July, 2010.

Interview with him: Conducted Dr. Timothy Fitzgerald and myself.

Prof. Timothy Fitzgerald and I (University of Stirling, Scotland, UK) had an interview with him on 19th July, 2010 at his residence in Janakpuri, New Delhi. Here are a few lines of conversation:

I: Is Buddhism a 'religion'? What is 'Dhamma'?

D.C. Ahir: Yes, Buddhism is a Religion. Dhamma is only the teachings and the culture which is only one aspect of Buddhism.

T. Fitzgerald: Did Muslims destroy Buddhist shrines?

D.C. Ahir: First, the Huns destroyed them in 6th century. Muslims came in the 10th century and destroyed Sarnath. As you can see, the noses of all the statues of Buddha except a few ones (such as the statues of Baudh Gaya, Sarnath and Shravasti) were destroyed. The statues of Baudh Gaya, Sarnath and Shravasti (as we can see now) are the only ones which were safe.

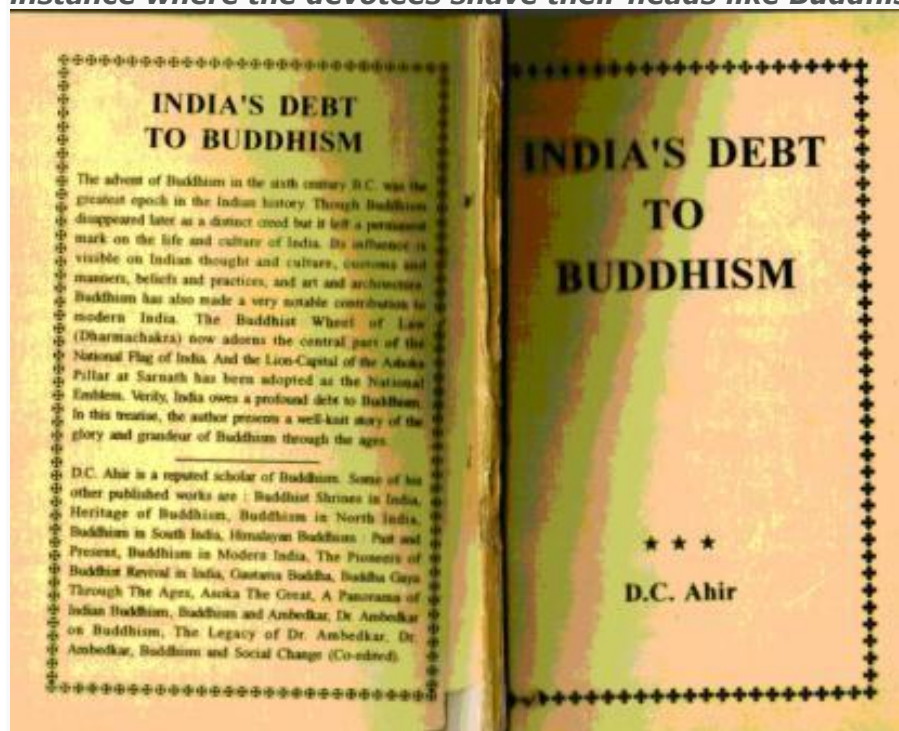
T. Fitzgerald: Did Shankaracharya destroy Buddhism in 10th century?

D.C. Ahir: To some extent.

T. Fitzgerald: What do you say on Ms. Mayawati's huge constructions in Gautam Buddha Nagar (NOIDA) and Lucknow?

D.C. Ahir: She has done really a historical work by building many sites.

He also informed us that *'there are many, so called hindu temples of today, and gods/goddesses, which are in reality related to Buddhism. For example, in Kerala, 'Ayyappa' means Buddha, where people can be seen reciting 'Ayyappa Sharanam, Dhammam Sharanam, Sangham Sharanam'. There are some hindu temples which in fact were Buddhist shrines earlier. Other than the Ayyapa temple, the Tirupati Balaji temple is also an instance where the devotees shave their heads like Buddhist monks'.*

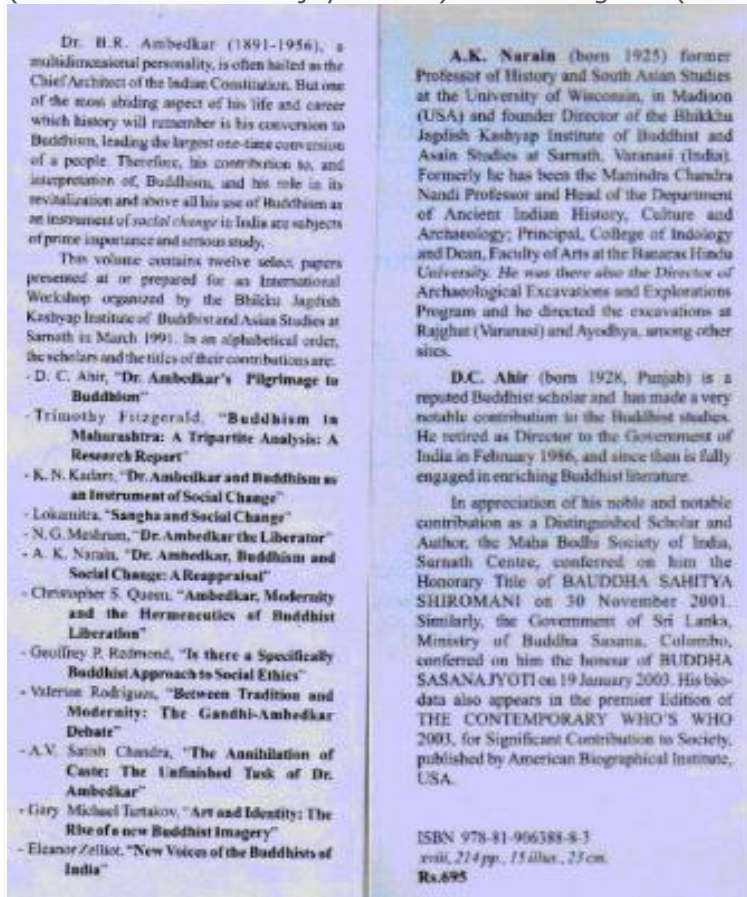


Life Sketch

D.C. Ahir was born on 20th February, 1928 to Ms. Shanti and Mr. Ramumal as a fifth child in a village called Baath-Kalan, Nakodar tehsil in Jalandhar (Punjab). His village is around 30 kilometers away from the city.

He did his primary education from his village school, Harihar Primary School. Between 1938 and 1942, he went to Higher Secondary School in Nakodar tehsil. The school was 5 kilometers away, and he travelled the 10 km distance everyday on foot. In 1945, he completed his intermediate with first division. Despite getting first division, the poor family's conditions didn't allow him to get admission in any university college for further education and so he concentrated on taking up a job which he got on 28 June, 1945 in the department of war transportation (road) as a clerk in Shimla, the then summer capital of Government of India. As the offices of the government came to Delhi in 1946, he also came to Delhi on 7th February, 1946, and since then remained here throughout his life. While in the job, he completed his graduate degree in October 1956 from Punjab University. On December 10, 1947, he got

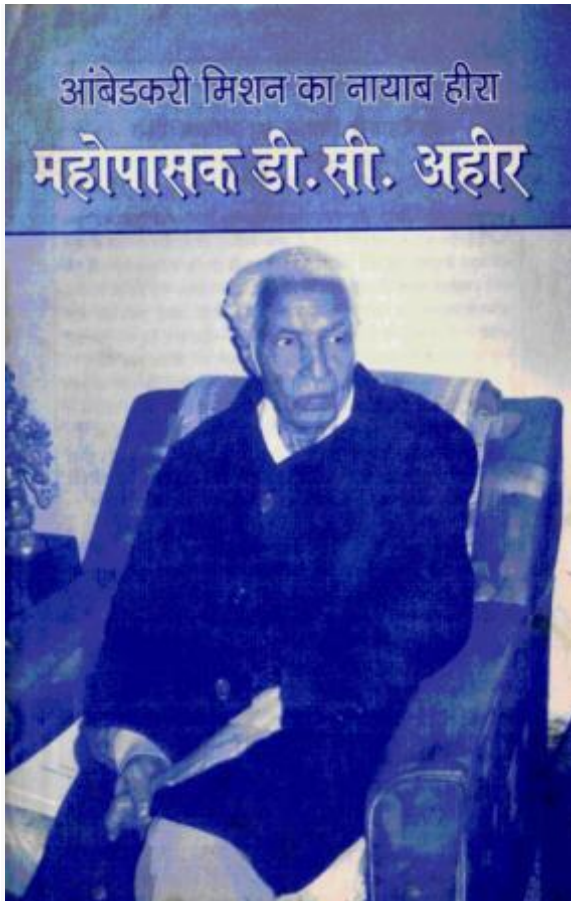
married to Ms. Swaranlata from Nagra village of Fillore Tehsil in Jalandhar. He had two sons (Nirmal Kumar and Vijay Kumar) and a daughter (Sunita).



Dr. Timothy Fitzgerald has contributed an article in the book 'Dr. Ambedkar, Buddhism & Social Change', edited by D.C. Ahir & A.K. Narain.

Memories with Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar

After coming to Delhi, D.C. Ahir was very much keen on meeting Babasaheb Ambedkar. On 11 March, 1946, at 22 Prithviraj Road, he got a valuable chance to see Ambedkar, along with some young dalit government employees from various departments in Delhi. That was his first chance to see and hear Babasaheb Ambedkar closely. During this visit he saw Buddha's statue in Babasaheb's drawing room. After that he continued to meet him, and his every meeting with Babasaheb left an indelible mark on his personality. In his own words, "**For me, Babasaheb was the symbol of self-development, self-service, and self-dignity. I was so impressed with his personality that I would get enchanted with every thought of his. Whenever, I met him and touched his feet, my happiness knew no bounds. I met him for the last time on 8th October, 1956, at his residence at 26 Alipur Road, New Delhi, when he was busy with the proof reading of his great book 'Buddha and His Dhamma'. As I was accompanied by three other friends, he accepted our request for a meeting. After our meeting was over, I helped him to go inside as Nanak Chand Rattu (PS to Babasaheb) had gone to the railway station for getting the tickets for Nagpur (for his Deeksha Day on 14th October, 1956). With one hand on my shoulder and a stick in another, we reached his reading hall with a slow walk. That was the first time when he put his hand on my shoulder affectionately, but it also became his last blessings on me as he died within two months after that.**" (Translation is mine. Source: Booklet by Samyak Prakshan on him).



The booklet distributed by Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, on 26th January, 2010.

Towards Buddhism

He got very much attracted towards Buddhism in 1950 and started associating with it in 1956 (2,500th Buddha Purnima) after the clarion call of Dr. Ambedkar for conversion to Buddhism. Thereafter, his life was a dedication to Buddhism. His *dharmma gurus* are Bhadant Anand kausalyan and L. Aryavansh Mahathero. He was also associated with Buddha's birth anniversary celebrations in 1956 by the Tourism Department (Govt. of India). Though, formally, he declared his conversion only on 1st October, 1960.

He has been affiliated with many Buddhist societies too, but mostly with Mahabodhi Society of India (MSI). He became its member in 1960 and then the life member in 1964. In 1964, the MSI organised the Seventh World Fellowship of Buddhists' conference in Sarnath, in which he also participated. On the occasion of 2,600th Buddha Purnima, 27-29 March, 1977, MSI, in association with Education and Social Welfare Ministry, arranged an international conference at Vigyan Bhawan (New Delhi) on '**Buddhism's Contribution to World Culture and Civilization**'; he was in the managing committee of the event and also gave the vote of thanks. From 1989 to 1995, he was in the managing committee of the MSI.

Being in government service, D.C. Ahir also got many promotions, starting from clerk to director to the Govt. of India, in his almost 43 years of service. He retired in February 1986, and since then has been very actively engaged with his writings and other Buddhist activities. He visited Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia and Bangkok in his service period, and his most memorable trip had been to Sri Lanka, in 1977, where his MSI friends invited him. He delivered lectures also there on Buddhism in the **University of Sri Jayewardenepura** and the **University of Kelaniya**.

Dr. Ambedkar, Buddhism and Social Change

A.K. Nairam
D.C. Altur



His Writings

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2. *Buddhism and Ambedkar*, 1968, 1990
3. *Buddhism in the Capital of India*, 1969
4. *Buddhism in the Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh*, 1971
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2. *National Seminar on Dr. Ambedkar and Buddhism*, Department of Buddhist Studies, Delhi University, 15 December 1987.
3. *All India Seminar on Buddhism and National Unity*, Department of Buddhist Studies, Delhi University, 16-18 March, 1988.

4. *Seminar on India-Sri Lanka Cultural Interaction*, organised by Asoka Mission, New Delhi, 31 July-2 August 1990.
5. *International Buddhist Conference*, Japanese Temple, Bodhgaya, 5-10 December, 1990.
6. *Seminar on Dr. Ambedkar, Politics and Religion*, organised by Bodhisattva Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Maha Sabha, Lucknow, 9 February 1991.
7. *National Seminar on Dr. Ambedkar, Science and Society*, National Physical Laboratory, New Delhi, 8 March 1991.
8. *International Workshop on Dr. Ambedkar, Buddhism and Social Change*, organised by the Bhikkhu Jagdish Kashyap. Institute of Buddhist and Asian Studies, Samath, 29-31 March, 1991.
9. *National Seminar on Dr. Ambedkar*, organised by the Government of India, Ministry of Welfare, New Delhi, 15 April, 1991.
10. *National Seminar on Dr. Ambedkar*, organised by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 18-20 August 1991.
11. *Seminar on Contribution of Buddhism to Modern India - Services rendered by Anagarika Dharmapala and Dr. Ambedkar*, Maha Bodhi Society of India, Sarnath, 18-20 November 1991.
12. *National Convention on World Peace and Humanity Through Buddhism*, Maha Bodhi Society of India, New Delhi, 14 December 1991.
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17. *International Seminar on Vipassana - Its Relevance to the Present World*, organised by Vipassana Research Institute, Igatpuri and hosted by Vipassana Sadhana Sansthan, New Delhi, alongwith Yoga Club, I.I.T., New Delhi 15-17 April, 1994.
18. *Symposium on Hindu and Buddhist Traditions: Distinction without Difference?*, organised by Max Muller Bhavan with and at India International Centre, 29 February 1996.
19. *National Consultation on Meeting of Religions and Cultures*, organised by Commission for Education and Cultures, CBCI Centre, I, Ashok Place, New Delhi, Catholic Bishops Conference of India, 24-28 February, 1997.
20. *Seminar on 50 Years of Independence - Contribution of Buddhism*, organised by the Maha Bodhi Society of India, Sarnath, 15 August 1997
21. *Seminar on Buddha Dhamma and its Relevance to the Contemporary Society*, organised by Buddha Dhamma Sangha, (Buddhist Students Union), Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 5 March 1999.
22. *World Conference on Religious Freedom, Religious Freedom: A Fundamental Right in the 21st Century*, organised by International Religious Liberty Association, Maryland, USA, and IRLA India, Hosur, Tamil Nadu, at New Delhi, 16-18 November, 1999.

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